

## Virtual Discovery Weekend Guide

Your youth—like the rest of your congregation—are discovering a new normal: a world of masks, social distancing, Zoom, and hand sanitizer. The pandemic forced the cancellation of graduation, spring dances, spring break, baseball season, VBS, summer mission trips, in-person worship, and possibly your already scheduled Discovery Weekend. Perhaps you have wondered how to have meaningful and transformative experiences for your youth while your church is following guidelines for safe gatherings.

The following tips will guide your church as you plan and carry out an *online* Discovery Weekend, a spiritual formation retreat for middle school youth that engages high school youth in leadership and invites the entire congregation to be a community of love and forgiveness. Although Discovery Weekends are usually held in the local church, this **Virtual Discovery Weekend Guide** will help you create an online environment where middle school youth are encouraged to strengthen their faith.

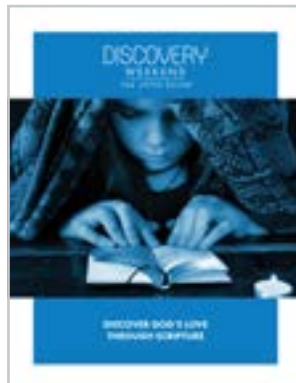
### >Select your theme:

The three manuals provide everything needed for your Discovery Weekend on the chosen theme.



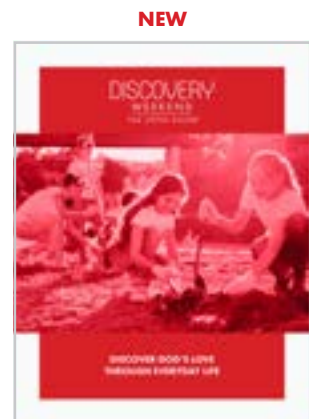
### Discover God's Love Through the Church

The *Discover God's Love Through the Church* manual focuses on discovering the joy of living in God's love as a body of believers as well as welcoming those outside the church to discover God's profound love. Youth will share in the friendship and forgiveness of Christ, who loves us for who we are and calls us to do the same for one another, together as Christ's church.



### Discover God's Love Through Scripture

The *Discover God's Love Through Scripture* manual focuses on encountering the life-giving love of God found in the scriptures and living according to God's image. Middle school youth will learn that through scripture, we discover our connection to Jesus and our call to love God and others.



### Discover God's Love Through Everyday Life

The *Discover God's Love Through Everyday Life* manual focuses on experiencing God's love in the world every day. Students will learn to notice God through their individual prayers and spiritual practices, in their relationships with God and with their neighbors, through receiving and offering forgiveness, and through service out in the world.

### Take advantage of our Virtual Discovery special!

Take 60% off ANY Discovery Weekend manual when you use the promo code **VIRTUAL60**.

Offer active through December 31, 2020.

## >>Gather your team.

You may already have a team in place, or you may need to recruit. There are people in your church looking for ways to put faith into action. Invite them to help create an amazing experience with the students in your congregation or community. The manual gives you everything you need to equip your leaders.

## >>>Dive in.

Ask your team to follow the manuals for planning talks, group sessions, games, and support, and ask them to review these tips and tools for offering your Discovery Weekend online. It is recommended that when you gather the planning team, you read through these tips together, discussing any unique issues that arise with your group.

### **Working online:**

- Use online tools like Zoom, Messenger Groups, Google Meet, or GoToMeeting and make adjustments for the virtual nature of your planning meetings.
- Realize this will not be the same as an in-person weekend, and know it's ok. Adjust the resources in ways that accommodate your current reality.
- Many churches already worship together online, and the same formats used for online worship can work well for sessions involving all Virtual Discovery Weekend participants.
- Offer training for teen and adult leaders for the chosen online platform(s).
- Carefully research the safety features of the online platform you choose, and implement those needed to ensure your group's online experience is as safe as possible.
- Have the entire leadership and planning team read the following article and adapt your church protection policies for online meetings: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/safe-sanctuaries-supporting-a-shift-to-online-youth-ministry-meetings>
- Encourage students to decrease distractions like texting, social media, and email during the event. Or find ways to incorporate those "distractions" into the event. Consider having an assigned support person facilitate breaks for students to post or text messages about the event and then draw them back, to be recentered and refocused on the event.
- Plan for Disciple Groups to "meet" on preplanned online meeting platforms like Facebook Messenger Rooms.
- Invite musicians to join live, or with prerecorded music.

### **Connect with parents/guardians:**

- Make sure parents are given all information for the weekend without relying on them to give more leadership than they are comfortable providing.
- Coordinate with someone in the student's household prior to the event to provide fun surprises and assist if they are willing and comfortable doing so.

### **Plan the event schedule:**

- **EATING and SLEEPING** still need to happen. Consider making a contest for "Discovery Chef Creations." Have a bedtime story time. Find ways to make this retreat unique enough for middle schoolers to remember it as a special experience, even compared to an in-person Discovery Weekend.
- **BREAKS** are important. Be sure that your weekend schedule allows students time for play, reflection, and rest.
- **WORSHIP** can still happen with the theme of your weekend in mind. Work on a plan with your pastor, who will probably be glad to have something new and different to set apart the service that week. (Note: Some churches might choose to wait and hold the Commitment Service when they are able to meet in person. This can give the students something special to look forward to and can help you gather everyone after the event.)

## >>>>Be creative.

Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing. Share your creative ideas on social media online using #VirtualDiscovery to help other churches plan their virtual weekends.

- Download the Virtual Discovery “Home” Graphics Package for social media graphics, website and email headers, and more. [The “Home” Graphics Package is now available FREE](#) as part of our Virtual Discovery special.
- Preplan to have fun snacks delivered at a specified time.
- Consider creating a “Discovery Package” for each participant with a t-shirt, snacks, and any supplies not readily available in students’ houses. Make arrangements to safely deliver the packages, or ask parents/guardians to pick them up at your church.
- Play online scavenger hunt by asking students—as individuals or on teams—to gather various common items/people from around the house: a blow-dryer, a dog or cat, cheese, an adult, a sibling, a winter coat... Give them 10 minutes. The person or team with the most items from the list displayed together on the screen at the same time wins.
- When students would normally hold hands in a circle, ask them to touch the screen.
- Need more game ideas? Google “Zoom Youth Group Games.”
- Share prayer requests by using the chat tools of your chosen online meeting platform, or invite individuals to share prayer requests on The Upper Room Prayer Wall: [UpperRoom.org/prayerwall](https://UpperRoom.org/prayerwall).
- Use any available emoticons, like the applause and thumbs-up emoticons on Zoom.
- If you usually offer t-shirts, encourage students to wear them.
- For more Discovery Weekend ideas from other churches, visit [Discovery.UpperRoom.org/ideas](https://Discovery.UpperRoom.org/ideas).

If you are working on a **Virtual Discovery Weekend** and need suggestions or help with your plans, check in with the Discovery team. Call 615.340.7088 or email [discovery@upperroom.org](mailto:discovery@upperroom.org).

We don’t have all of the answers, just open hearts and a willing spirit for collaboration on how this ministry can change your middle schoolers’ lives.

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